

ORGANIZATION OF THE ISLAMIC CONFERENCE WILL GAIN U.S. ENVOY

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WASHINGTON, JULY 5 -- American appreciation for Islam was the theme of President Bush's speech at the Islamic Center of Washington on the mosque's 50th anniversary June 27.

The president also announced he will appoint a U.S. envoy to the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) to "listen and learn" and share U.S. views with delegates from Muslim nations.

The appointment is intended "to demonstrate to Muslim communities our interest in respectful dialogue and continued friendship," he said. It will be the first time an American president has appointed an envoy to the OIC.

Bush reaffirmed U.S. commitment to the Middle East peace process. "We will work toward a day when a democratic Palestine lives side by side with Israel in peace," he said.

Calling the mosque's anniversary a "celebration of America's diversity of faith and our unity as free people," Bush quoted the poet Rumi: "The lamps are different, but the light is the same."

He said the location of the Islamic center, on the same street as Christian churches, a Jewish synagogue and a Buddhist temple, is evidence of a society where "people can live and worship as they choose without intimidation."

The long-time imam of the Islamic Center, Abdullah M. Khouj, introduced the president, remarking on the tolerance and freedom of religion in the United States and recalling the speech of another U.S. president.

When the Islamic center was dedicated in 1957, then-President Dwight D. Eisenhower called it one of "the most beautiful buildings in Washington," and said "America would fight with her whole strength for your right to have here your own church and worship according to your own conscience." Fifty years later, Bush echoed his sentiments.

"The freedom to worship is so central to America's character that we tend to take it personally when that freedom is denied to others," he said.

Adding that "the greatest challenge" is to "help the forces of moderation win the great struggle against extremism," Bush condemned extremists and the way they misrepresent Islam and the American perspective. "This enemy falsely claims that America is at war with Muslims and the Muslim faith, when in fact it is these radicals who are Islam's true enemy," he said.

Bush paid a visit to the Islamic center days after the September 11, 2001, attacks, when he also spoke of the importance of the Muslim community in America.

The generous outpouring of assistance to Muslim countries in times of disaster is a sign of American friendship toward Muslims, he said, citing relief sent after earthquakes in Iran and Pakistan, and the tsunami in Indonesia and Malaysia.

“Our country defended Muslims in Bosnia and Kosovo after the breakup of Yugoslavia. Today we’re rallying the world to confront genocide in Sudan,” he said.

Bush reiterated U.S. commitment to young democracies in the Muslim world, saying, “A democratic future is not a plan imposed by Western nations; it is a future that the people of the region will seize for themselves.”

“America offers its hand in friendship,” Bush concluded.

For additional details, see the full text in this address:

(<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=texttrans-english&y=2007&m=June&x=20070626154822lnkais0.6946985&t=livefeeds/wf-latest.html>) of Eisenhower’s speech and a transcript (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=texttrans-english&y=2007&m=June&x=20070627124943eaifas2.862185e-02&t=livefeeds/wf-latest.html>) of Bush’s speech.

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